

United States Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

Decision Record Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0026

July, 2013

West Dolores Rim Hazardous Fuels Reduction

Location: Dolores and San Miguel Counties, Colorado
Township 43 N, Range 19 W, sec. 36;
Township 43 N, Range 18 W, sec. 28, 29, 31- 33;
Township 42 N, Range 18 W, sec. 5- 11, 15- 18, 21, 22, 26-28, 33- 35;
Township 42 N, Range 19 W, sec. 12;
Township 41 N, Range 18 W, sec. 2, 3, 11, 14-16, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27, 35, 36;
Township 41 N, Range 17 W, sec. 19, 30-32;
Township 40 N, Range 17 W, sec. 4- 9;
Township 40 N, Range 18 W, 1, 2, 12

Applicant/Address: Tres Rios Field Office, BLM, 29211 Highway 184, Dolores, CO

Tres Rios Field Office
29211 Highway 184
Dolores, Colorado, 81323
970-882-7296 (phone)
970-882-6841 (fax)



DECISION RECORD
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0026
West Dolores Rim Hazardous Fuels Reduction

DECISION:

I have reviewed the Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2012-0026-EA) (EA) and have prepared a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI, June 2013). After review of those documents, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action and design features (Selected Alternative) as described in the EA, and to begin hazardous fuels reduction within the identified units.

Authorities: The authority for this decision is contained in: Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 (43 USC 1701 et seq); Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-514) Section 14 (b); Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations; a) Sections 4120.3-1-Conditions for Range Improvement; b) Section 4180.1- Fundamentals of Rangeland Health; c) Section 4190.1 Effects of Wildfire Management Decisions; and d) Section 5003.1 – Forest Management Decisions.

Compliance and Monitoring: The BLM will implement pre-treatment monitoring of surface fuel loading and invasive species composition, which will be done following standard line intercept fuel loading plots or photo series, as well as by either utilizing a one meter by one meter quadrant at each plot to evaluate invasive species composition or designating photo points within each unit to visually track invasive species composition. This monitoring is required prior to any prescribed fire, as well as once within two years post treatment.

During implementation of any prescribed fire, weather conditions, fire behavior, smoke observations, and first order fire effects would be monitored by either the prescribed fire burn boss or fire effects monitor.

Terms / Conditions / Stipulations: The proposed action will be in accordance with the following design features:

1. Wildlife

Gunnison Sage Grouse

- All activities, except foot and horse traffic, should be limited to established roads and trails in areas of known winter concentration (RCP) December 1 to March 15.
- Management activities should not contribute to noise levels and surface disturbing activities that create excessive noise (>34 decibels) within 4.0 miles of an active lek from should be avoided from March 1 to June 30. Any necessary equipment should produce minimal noise; all compressors, vehicles, and other sources of noise should be equipped with effective mufflers or noise suppression devices.
- Any sagebrush removal or vegetation treatment is prohibited within 0.60 miles of an active lek unless implemented to maintain or enhance the lek (RCP).
- Sagebrush treatment is not discouraged but will be planned to achieve the habitat objectives outlined in the RCP.

- Limit activities, motorized or non-motorized, between sunset the evening before to 2 hours after sunrise the next morning.
- Any treatments should be small in size. Sagebrush loss, removal, treatments, or other surface-disturbing activities should not exceed 10% of the delineated winter habitat.
- Treatments should be irregular in shape and not distributed predictably or systematically on the landscape. Treatments in the shape of rows or strips will not occur.

Migratory birds

- Avoid treatments during the migratory bird nesting season from May 15 – July 15. This timeframe encompasses the core breeding period for the majority of migratory birds in the project area. Project activities shall retain and avoid modifying identified cavity trees, snags, and perches. Exceptions or variances to this restriction will be considered and evaluated according to TRFO policies.
- Any snags over 16” diameter at breast height (DBH) would be retained throughout project implementation. Additionally, snags that meet this DBH requirement would be lined or otherwise avoided when burning occurs in units with these snag components.

Raptors

- To ensure protection of nesting raptors and Bald and Golden eagles, pre-treatment surveys would be performed for presence of key species in suitable habitat. If an active raptor nest is discovered in any unit, a species-specific spatial or temporal buffer would be applied until the nest either successfully fledges young as follows:
- Peregrine Falcons - .5 mile no disturbance buffer May 15- July 31
- Northern Goshawks and other raptor species –Human encroachment should not occur within ½ mile radius of active nest March 1 – August 31
- Golden Eagle and Bald Eagle - no disturbance within .5 miles Dec. 15 – July 15.
- Bald Eagle winter roost site - Human encroachment should not occur within ¼ mile radius indirect line of sight, or ½ mile radius direct line of sight. This timing limitation is applicable between November 15 to March 15. Limit activity at dusk and dawn if encroachment will occur within buffer zone.

Big Game

- Avoid conducting treatments within big game critical and severe winter range, and winter concentration areas between December 1st and April 30th of each year. (Appendix B, Figure 5).
- Avoid conducting treatments in units containing mapped production areas between May 15 to June 30 (Appendix B, Figure 5).

Mexican Spotted Owls

- A survey for presence of MSO will be conducted if treatment is within ½ mile of canyon rims. If surveys are completed, projects activities can occur for a period of 5 years before additional surveys will be required. If Mexican spotted owl surveys are not possible, implementation in units with 0.5 miles of the canyon rim would be conducted outside of the breeding season March 1 – August 31.

2. Range

- In coordination with affected livestock permittees, grazing management actions that provide for rest and or deferment from grazing would be planned as necessary following treatment activities.
- Range permittees would be coordinated with in advance of treatments to offset any temporary loss of forage or lack of access due to the need to rest units prior to or after prescribed fire to increase fine fuel loading.
- Areas treated with prescribed fire would be rested from grazing for two full growing seasons unless vegetation recovery dictates otherwise.
- Treatments would avoid any damage to existing range improvement infrastructure.

3. Invasive Weeds

- Prior to any prescribed fire or ground disturbing mechanical treatment (with the exception of hand-thinning and piling, and prescribed fire line preparation) , the planned units would be visited by an interdisciplinary team consisting of, at a minimum, fire and fuels staff, weeds staff, and wildlife staff to analyze the composition of native grasses relative to invasive species (i.e. cheatgrass) presence (this is not necessary for re-entry burning in ponderosa pine). The specific purpose of the analysis would be to discuss and determine if the composition and vigor of native/seeded species relative to the abundance, vigor, and seed potential of cheatgrass in each unit is such that the natives are likely to out-compete cheatgrass or any other invasives, post-treatment. If cheatgrass is relatively abundant and native/seeded species less vigorous and less abundant then treatment of those specific units will be postponed. If native/seeded species are vigorous and make up most of the composition and cheatgrass is only found in isolated pockets and/or is not vigorous then treatment can be scheduled for those units. Typically precipitation patterns are the driver for changes in native/cheatgrass composition, with fall and spring moisture patterns positively influencing cheatgrass germination and growth while late spring and summer moisture is more ideal for native plant vigor and growth. These precipitation patterns can also be monitored pre-treatment to assist in determining suitability for scheduling treatments.
- Pre-treatment of invasive weeds may be required prior to implementation of the proposed action. This would be determined during the pre-treatment site visit with the above identified resource specialists. Specifically, in areas that it is determined invasive weeds exceed 10% of site biomass, pre-treatment is recommended prior to implementation.
- Post-treatment monitoring for cheatgrass, as well as other exotic/noxious species presence, would take place to determine if additional post-treatment management for those species needs to occur. Two and five year post-treatment monitoring is effective in identifying any issues with these non-native species. In some locations in the SW District it appears that with proper scheduling of treatments relative to 'low cycles' of cheatgrass abundance and vigor, post-treatment vegetation response is acceptable and treatments are effective in meeting project objectives with no, or minimal increases in cheatgrass.

- In areas where noxious weed control measures are completed, effective monitoring would occur following treatments. In areas where noxious weed populations were not present at the time of treatment, monitoring would be completed during the growing season following treatment to ensure that no new populations of invasive weeds become established.
- All vehicles associated with both mastication and timber harvesting, as well as transport vehicles, would be power washed prior to moving on-site to prevent the spread of invasive weeds.
- Temporary skid routes used for hauling timber would be obliterated and seeded, and landings and skid routes will be ripped and seeded with a native seed mix based on the recommendation of the appropriate specialist after completion of any timber sales or hand thinning operations.

4. Cultural Resources

- Prior to implementation, cultural resources would be flagged for avoidance from project activities.

5. Minerals

- Mining claim corner posts within units would be identified prior to implementation and avoided.

6. Recreation

- Any control lines created for prescribed fire activities would be hidden or obliterated where they intersect roads after the prescribed fire is called out to discourage off road travel, and would be rehabilitated within the treatment season.
- One week prior to any implementation of these Alternative, units would be signed at all road entry points with a notice of the intended action as well as a map. Prior to prescribed fire implementation, the units would be checked by a field office employee and cleared of campers or hunters inside the unit for public safety.

7. Hydrology and Soils

- Ruts created by machinery would not exceed 10 feet long and/or 4 inches deep.
- Ephemeral drainages would be buffered by a distance of 50 feet on both sides of the draw. No mechanical treatments would occur within the buffer. During prescribed fire implementation, no ignition would occur within this buffer, but fire would be allowed to back into drainages.
- Springs would be buffered by a distance of 100 feet from all mechanical treatments. A no ignition buffer would be placed 50 feet from springs during prescribed fire implementation. Fire would be allowed to burn through spring area.

- In pinyon/juniper areas that receive roller chopping, seeding would occur after mechanical treatments are completed with a seed mix recommended by the appropriate specialist. In pinyon/juniper areas that are encroaching on sagebrush meadows, seeding of disturbed areas may occur with a seed mix based on the recommendation the appropriate specialist.

8. Air Quality

- A Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment issued smoke permit is required prior to any prescribed fire.

9. Fuels Management

- Prior to implementation, an Interdisciplinary Team will review proposed treatment units and complete any resource specific inventories, on-sites, etc. necessary to implement pending planned projects.

Additionally, as part of the design of the proposed action, any mechanical thinning in areas of sagebrush will focus on woody overstory removal only, and not target sagebrush as part of the understory or in sage parks throughout the project area.

PLAN CONFORMANCE AND CONSISTENCY:

The proposed action and alternatives have been reviewed and found to be in conformance with the following BLM Land Use Plans and the associated decision(s).

The proposed action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: San Juan/San Miguel Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Date Approved: September 5, 1985, amended (1991)

Language/Page: The proposed action is consistent with the terms and goals of the following; livestock grazing management (page 5-6), timber management (page 21-22), managing habitats to provide forage for wildlife (page 12). The majority of the analysis area is in management area J emphasis on forestry and wood products. A portion of the analysis area near Egnar is in management area A, with emphasis on livestock management. One section in the Spud Patch area is in management area E, with emphasis on mineral development.


For Emphasis Area A, in regards to Fire Management, general guidance in the RMP states, “Provide level of protection from wildfire that will result in least total cost and will generally enhance range management values. Use prescribed fire to enhance forage production” (Page 28). With regards to hazardous fuels reduction and prescribed fires within Emphasis Area J, General Guidance the RMP states, “Provide a level of protection from wildfire that will result in a least total cost and will enhance forest resources. Use prescribed fire when possible to enhance forest management objectives” (Page 54). A Red book amendment to this RMP was issued in 1997 authorizing the use of prescribed fire.

Alternatives Considered: The EA considered the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative. The No action alternative would not meet the purpose and need for action. No other alternatives were needed to address any unresolved resource conflicts.

Rationale for Decision: Implementation of the Proposed Action will meet the purpose and need for action as described in the EA. The purpose and need is established by the BLM's responsibility under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 USC 1701 et seq.), as well as the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (16 USC 6501 et seq.). The action conforms to the existing land use plan as described above. The project was listed on the San Juan Public Lands Schedule of Proposed Action (SOPA) since January 2012. In addition, the project was listed on the BLM NEPA log in January 2013, notifying the public of the scoping period. In addition, interested parties, government agencies, and potentially affected Native American Tribes were sent seeking comments. A comment period on a preliminary EA occurred in June of 2013, with letters seeking comments sent to the above listed parties. During the comment period, five letters were received and considered in the Environmental Analysis, as appropriate (Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of EA).

Protest/Appeal Language: This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the Authorized Officer, Connie Clementson, in accordance with 43 CFR 5003.1 (b) and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay (42 CFR 2801.10(b)). Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4.

Within 30 days of the decision, a notice of appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at the Dolores Public Lands Office, 29211 Highway 184, Dolores, CO, 81323. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of Hearings and Appeals; U.S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer. Within 30 days, the public has the right of appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.4.00. Appeal and stay procedures are outlined in Form CO-050-1840-191.



Connie Clementson
Field Manager
Tres Rios Field Office

7.26.13

Date

Attachments: Project Map

Attachment A: Project Map

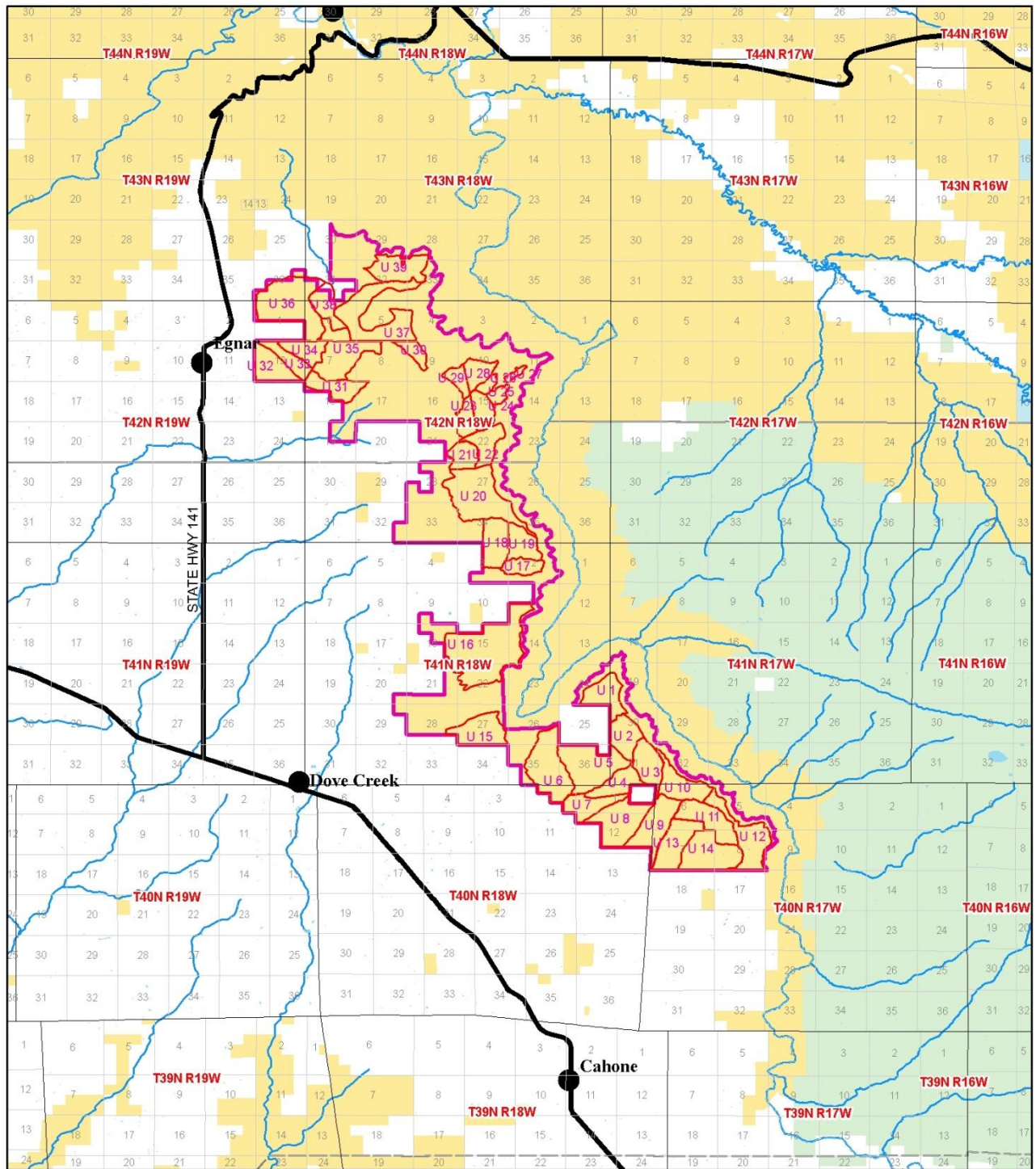


Figure 1:

West Dolores Rim EA Vicinity Map and Project Area Boundary

DOI-BLM-CO-SO10-2012-0026

Prepared by: bpietruszka
Current Date: 01/25/2013 08:21:35 AM

No warranty is made by the Bureau of Land Management as to the accuracy, eligibility, or completeness of these data for individual or aggregate use with other data. Original data were compiled from various sources and may be updated without notification.

